Christianity and the Ancient World

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One renowned lecture presented by a Regent faculty member in recent years has been Rikk Watts's "The Impact of Early Christianity." In light of Rikk's recent return to his native Australia and to highlight his many contributions to the College, we offer this lecture in its entirety. I recommend the article for both the view Rikk presents on the early church, and his useful insights into how we think and behave, two thousand years later.

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Fundamental to understanding the pagan world in which Christianity first took root is the ancient city.[1] And fundamental to the city is that it was, first and foremost, a home for the temple of the local god, from whose glory the city's identity radiated. It was around these centres that families, clans, and tribes had long past gathered, seeking a kind of peace under a vague ancestral law, itself the deity's ancient gift. Thus temples, shrines, sacred pillars, regular city-wide religious festivals, sacrificial animals, and the markets nearby wherein their meat was sold—everywhere formed the cluttered backdrop to daily life. Nothing was done without consulting the gods. To reject the city's deities was, for the general populace, at the very least uncitizenly and at worst rebellion against the divine law.[2]

But what was city life like under this archaic regime?[3] Usually founded as a fortress, a city's walled area was small, rarely more than two square miles. Remove the 30 percent or more devoted to public buildings, and a largish city of 150,000 might have a population density of around 150 persons per acre. Rome had in excess of 300. Compare this to modern-day Manhattan Island, which, with all its high-rise buildings and apartment blocks, has only 110. Crowded Mumbai has some 180—not even two thirds of Rome.

Nor do modern New Yorkers share their apartments and streets with livestock, as did the Romans, whose streets were mostly just under ten feet wide. In many places only footpaths separated the buildings. Everywhere one went, one was jostled. The noise was incessant. "Insomnia is the main cause of death in Rome," moaned Juvenal; "show me the apartment that lets you sleep!"[4]

Entire families were herded together in tiny cramped cubicles with paper-thin walls. Were it not for the drafty open windows, they would have succumbed to the poisonous smoke from inadequate cooking and heating braziers. Admitting minimal light, at least the windows helped remove the stench of the ubiquitous chamber pot soon to be emptied into the street below. (We have good evidence that the Roman juror did not disdain to hear complaints from the unfortunate below who had been thusly baptized.) But these drafts also increased the risk of fire—feared alike by rich and poor. Over its six-hundred-year existence, Antioch was burned four times almost in its entirety. This does not include the many large fires deliberately set during six periods of serious public rioting. Everyday housing was cramped, dark, often smoky and unsafe, always dirty, and permeated with the stench of sweat, feces, and decay. As the dust, dirt, and rubbish accumulated, the bugs ran riot.

Outside was not much better. Filled with refuse of every imaginable kind, the average street was about mud, open sewers, manure, human excrement, and even the occasional body shoved outdoors and abandoned, all nicely stewing in the blazing Mediterranean sun. No wonder the wealthy loved incense. Cities for the vast majority were pest-holes of disease, marked by chronic health conditions, swollen eyes,

and skin rashes. Lost and disfigured limbs and scars of various kinds were commonly listed as distinguishing marks in legal documents. Without a constant influx of new inhabitants, the ancient city would have died, and many did, so dangerous were they to their inhabitants. Ironically, it was this very influx that contributed to the danger: the higher the turn-over, the higher the crime rate.

Absent significant personal attachments, violence and ethnic tension were rampant. As night descended, people fled to their homes to barricade themselves in. In the dark, the criminal reigned. To go out without having made one's will was an act of folly. Even if all spoke Greek as a second language, ethnic identities and mutual suspicion remained firmly in place. Though people were often walled-off into ethnic quarters, riots were frequent and often murderous. To this already gloomy scene must be added the roster of the ever-present threat of flood, earthquake, and famine (the latter probably underlies Paul's advising Corinthian young people to put off their marriages if they can, 1 Cor. 7:26). Again, Antioch, over its six centuries, experienced one such devastating event every fifteen years. And all this occurred under a crushing local political hierarchy, ruled by a handful of fabulously wealthy and often feuding aristocratic families. Beneath them were despised artisans (*they* worked with their hands) and crooked merchants, then the even more lowly and impoverished freedmen, throngs of non-human slaves, and finally the outlying barbarians. And at the pinnacle and in distant Olympian splendour sat the Roman emperor.

If the city was tough, the heavens were like brass. To begin, we must realize that no one in the ancient world thought they were practicing "religion."[5] The very concept is a modern conceit. *Religio* was instead a matter of unquestioned customary scruple, of what everyone did to ward off potential threats from the "divine," however conceived. It meant at the very least observing those practices associated with one's *polis*, which, hopefully, kept the deities content and benign. One made offerings, observed the requisite ritual purity, and ensured that what amounted to contractual prayers were said in exactly the right way using prescribed wording.

However, it did not help that the classical gods, hardly moral paragons themselves, did not much care for humanity. As an ancient child's writing exercise has it, "What is a god? That which is strong. What is a king? He who is equal to the divine."[6] It was not character but power that defined the gods, and to cross them meant a sure and certain sticky end. With such a great disparity in power, there could be no hope of any meaningful relationship.[7] In retaliation, graffiti from the second and third centuries AD increasingly displayed an almost blasphemous irreverence toward them. This was one of the reasons why the mystery religions of the East, with their tantalizing offer of friendship and fellowship, made such inroads; arguably preparing the way for yet another strange Eastern creation—Christianity.

Consequently, the common person's "enchanted" pre-modern world was anything but enchanting. It was dominated by beings, most of whom, if one's living conditions were anything to go by, were unquestionably malevolent. The disposition of these times was thus characterized by fear and anxiety, and expressed chiefly in astrology, magic, and occult practice—anything one could do to ward off impending doom.

There was, of course, the consolation of philosophy, with its "rational" reconfiguration of the divine. But that was an elite male's game. Without money, education, and leisure, the philosophical life was incomprehensible and impossible for the masses. In the first century, the two main options were Stoicism and Epicureanism, both of which Paul encountered when on trial for his life on Mars Hill. The former was by far the most influential, and in its street-level mutation the common wisdom of most; the latter was more elite and much less popular. The Stoic sought to align his

existence with the unfeeling rational principle that constituted the "grain" of the cosmos (the Logos).[8] Even initially baffling Fortuna could be brought to the heel of the Logos, as he trained himself for death—the natural end of all mortals. The Epicurean, convinced that the gods cared nothing for humanity, since to do so would disturb their perfection, found some relief in friendship among equals and in a measured enjoyment of life's similarly fleeting pleasures (early Christians were sometimes confused with them). Later, the newly nascent neo-Platonist would seek his other-worldly escape by purifying his material "soul" to prepare for a mystical "ascent" to the heavens. Nonetheless, by the second century, even the privileged elites felt the oppressive weight of the sometimes smiling, sometimes glowering, often cruel, and always impervious face of fickle Fate. Pervasive anxiety is not a uniquely modern invention.

Faced with these socially unsettling realities, the authorities shrewdly offered distractions by way of donations of bread and bloody games. And the more violent the life, the more violent the distraction. While it is perhaps an overstatement to claim that the ancient world was one of "capricious cruelty, and a vicarious love of death,"[9] nevertheless, death was banal and the individual of little value. Ought we to be surprised? Probably not. For Homer's heroes, the ancient gods, and Greek philosophers, compassion was immoral—it was a feminine weakness and an affront to justice—and forgiveness, rare. Virgil concludes his *Aeneid* with "the Trojan hero Aeneas, the symbolic forerunner of Augustus, standing over the corpse of an enemy he has just killed in a vengeful rage. Whether Aeneas's deed is proof of the essential evil of empire, or of its necessary cost, Virgil does not say—but Augustus liked the poem."[10]

The hereafter was for most even worse. Death marked the end of everything. Only the disembodied souls of a few great ones, like Augustus, would rise on death to join the godlike stars, while a few truly wicked would suffer eternal punishment. The rest were condemned to a shade-like wandering forever in the dry and dark nether regions. This life, brief and brutal though it be, was all there was.

The Coming of the Gospel of Jesus

It was into this urban world that the Jewish story of Jesus took its first steps; its adherents numbered, at the end of the first century, perhaps only seventy-five hundred in an empire of more than thirty million. Vanishingly small though this "third race" was, in time its message, lived out primarily in these cities, would change everything. So what made the difference? One aspect was the truly world-changing impact of Christian practice and lifestyle. But it is imperative to understand that one can no more separate Christian practice from its larger "worldview" than one can separate pagan virtue or ethics from Hellenism's very different construction of reality. Christian practice and pagan virtue/ethics are integral parts of undifferentiated wholes, which I will argue are inherently and fundamentally incommensurate.[11] The gospel was not about simply replacing "Zeus" with "Jesus" on a local temple. It was a life and death struggle over two ways life.[12] For this reason we must first briefly describe the larger conceptual world that the story of Jesus presupposed.

It is of first importance to understand that the gospel is neither about "going to heaven" nor even primarily being good.[13] The goal of Israel's narrative was the promise of the Father and the Son dwelling with and in us through the eternal life-giving Spirit, in resurrected and transformed bodies here on a gloriously renewed earth.[14] In anticipation of that sure and certain hope, guaranteed by Jesus's resurrection and the present experience of the Spirit, it offered a new way of being *in* the world, or to use Kavin Rowe's language, a radically different "grammar of life."[15] Fundamental to this grammar, as expressed in Scripture's narrative (not meta-narrative),[16] are Israel's strikingly different ideas about creation (cosmology), how we

know (epistemology), our conception of the gods (theology), society (sociology), what it means to be human (anthropology), and our moral vision (ethics/virtue).[17]

Given the centrality of cities in the first century and throughout antiquity, we will take up, as does Luke in his Acts of the Apostles, the age-old biblical paradigm of Jerusalem, the city of God, versus the opposing cities of "man." In the past these had numbered such metropolises as Memphis, Thebes, Babylon, Asshur, Tyre, Sidon, and Alexander's Athens. In the first century it was Rome, which by the end of that century was more Hellenized than the Greeks. It is at this most fundamental level—that is, the city as the cultural icon of the foundational "ideological" narrative that undergirds it—that the basic oppositions emerge. As is evident throughout Acts and especially Paul's defence on Mars Hill, Jerusalem's assumptions about reality posed a profound challenge to the centuries-old certainties upon and out of which the entire structure and fabric of the first-century world was built. There is good reason why the frustrated Thessalonikan mob described the apostles as "these people who have been turning the world upside down" (Act 17:6 NRSV). So, what was it that set Athens (along with its intellectual captive Rome) and Jerusalem at irreconcilable odds?

"Faith" versus "Reason"?

Whatever else, we must grant Athens its due. In an astonishing act of imagination, perhaps fueled by the sheer joy and beauty of rational thought, it made the remarkable claim that everything could be explained solely on the basis of the mind's grasp of logical necessity—that is, "reason." The fundamental assumption was that reason was what humans shared with the divine. Hence, what was reasonable to the human mind necessarily mirrored the reason, the *logos*, of the universe. And reading the likes of Plato or Aristotle, one cannot help but be impressed by the clarity, precision, and rigour with which they pursued this aim. Not surprisingly, given John's use of *logos*, one can fully appreciate the almost visceral compulsion of various Hellenistic church fathers to marry the best of Christian "faith" with the best of "reason." (And it is important to realize they that are not borrowing from Hellenism; they *are* Hellenists, and one does not borrow from whom one fundamentally is.) But, aside from the question of who decides what is "best" and on what grounds, the more fundamental question is surely whether Athens's "reason alone" principle was in fact true. This is what Tertullian denied and which, in every instance where it can be tested, has been shown to be mistaken.[18] It is one thing to say the universe is intelligible, that we can understand it by attending carefully to our experience and testing our theories against it. It is quite another to claim it is reasonable, that it must conform to what we, *a priori*, think is logical. Ultimately, it is reality that is real, not our ideas about it, no matter how "reasonable" they might seem to us.[19]

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This is why I think it is misleading to characterize the contrast between Jerusalem and Athens as one of "faith" versus "reason." First, according to the Scriptures, "faith" is the conviction of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). But Jerusalem's story begins with Moses "seeing" the burning bush and "hearing" Yahweh speak. Indeed, the senses—"seeing and hearing"—are central to Israel's foundational Exodus narrative.[20] As Moses and Israel were constantly reminded, they had "seen" firsthand Yahweh's mighty deeds and "heard" all that he had said. Similarly, the disciples "saw" and "heard" all that Jesus said and did (1 John 1:1–3), and this, be it noted, often in the face of their "unfaith." Christianity is not based on "faith." It is based on history, on what it claims actually

happened[21] as attested by eyewitnesses.[22] Now it is true that "faith" is required of those who only have the eyewitnesses' testimony (John 20:29). But this hardly means that testimony should be dismissed. Testimony is far and away the most common and indispensible mode by which humans acquire the overwhelming majority of what we regard as that reliable knowledge by which we live our lives every day.[23] The point is that Christian convictions have far more in common with Galileo and his telescope than Hellenic "reason." Put starkly, in the latter, "fact must conform to reason"; in the former, "reason must conform to fact," that is, to what God has actually done.[24]

Second, Christian experience, far from ruling out thoughtful engagement, thoroughly depends on it. The mistake is to identify "thinking" with Hellenic philosophy, as does, for example, Porphyry in his critique of Origen.[25] It is precisely because the disciples and Paul thought long and hard about what they saw and heard that they came, unshakably, to the conclusion that in Jesus, Israel's unique God, sole creator, and Lord of life had come among them. And their reasoning stands open to examination to this very day. But it is a reasoning based on historical experience, not on abstract demonstration. Again, just as Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, and Galileo thought carefully about what they witnessed, so too did the earliest followers of Jesus. In this methodological respect, Christian conviction has far more in common with modern science than either has with Hellenistic speculative philosophy.[26]

We might, then, be better served by putting the sandal on the other foot and asking whether Athens itself had thought carefully enough about its "faith" that everything could be known on the basis of "reason" alone. It ought to be abundantly clear that an explanation is not true merely because it seems logically coherent. It might seem logical to explain male testicles in terms of loom weights; after all, both do hang down.[27] But a false analogy is still false even if espoused by such a luminary as Aristotle.

And here again, we must give credit where credit is due. Although recently much maligned for its reliance on reason, the Enlightenment for that very reason also attended to the limits of that self-same reason. Coming from very different positions, both David Hume and Thomas Reid recognized that reason could never prove the existence even of something as ordinary and humble as last night's dirty socks lying in the corner. Kurt Gödel later showed that far from mathematics being the sure foundation of all knowledge, mathematics itself proved that it was impossible ever to demonstrate the internal consistency of our number system. In postmodern times, Stanley Fish made a similar point about morality. Although he believes that it is absolutely wrong to torture a child for entertainment, he recognizes there is no logic or reason that can prove it so. Indeed, reason cannot even establish that we are autonomous, responsible agents.

None of this is to reject thought. But both the poverty of Athenian "science" and the Enlightenment critique of pure reason surely demonstrate the profound limitations of Athens's reliance on logical demonstration alone. What is required is the constant testing of our apparently "reasonable" speculations against the real world of experience.

Creation (Cosmology)

Having cleared that ground, we can return to the question of Athens and Jerusalem. We begin, as does Genesis, with cosmology. And this is right and proper. If we are to understand how to interpret the world, we need first to know what it is. For Athens, Parmenides had long ago "demonstrated" that change was impossible. The cosmos was one, without beginning or end, perfect, eternal, and unchanging. For Pythagoras, history, imitating the cyclical movement of the heavenly bodies, was simply an endlessly recurring cycle through which the soul passed in a sequence of incarnations.[28] According to Heraclitus, the world was "unmade by god or man, was fire ever-

living, kindling and being extinguished in measures" (Frag. B 30). Just as one could never step into the same river twice, so all was in flux. The resolution was proposed by Empedocles: all change was merely apparent and simply due to rotation (Frag. 17). This led finally to the view advocated by the third-century-BC Stoic Chrysippus:

> This restoration of the universe takes place not once but over and over again, to all eternity without end. Those of the gods which are not subject to destruction, having observed the course of one period, know from this everything that is going to happen in all subsequent periods. There will never be any new thing other than that which has been before; but everything is repeated down to the minutest detail. (Frag. 625)

There was no logical possibility, and therefore no conception, of genuine change. Absent such hope, human existence was ultimately meaningless. For the Stoic, everything was already there in the unchanging logos; nothing new could happen. It remained the same for the Epicureans and their atomism. Even if everything was the result of the random swervings of "atoms," it was still an eternal and unchanging randomness.

Further, since according to "reason" the true could not change—otherwise it would not be true—and since it was assumed that only the true was real, anything that changed was necessarily only mere appearance and could not be real. This changeful world of daily experience, being below the lunar orbit—the boundary where the perfect cosmos began—was not truly real. Hence the duality that is fundamental to much Greek thought: the perfect and eternal heavens to which a few purified souls might hope to rise versus the distorted and merely apparent earth from which they sought escape. This cosmology shaped not only what Athens could know and how it could know it, but the social structure of its cities, its view of what it meant to be human, and its virtue/ethics. One's cosmology impacts everything it touches.

But for Jerusalem, the fundamental distinction was not between the changeless and the changing, the supernatural and natural, the spiritual and fleshly, the pure heavenly and the corrupt earthly, or the perfect, rational, ideal form and the distorted "bastard" subjectivity of the apparent world.[29] Jerusalem began first and crucially with the creator and his creation. Indeed, one might argue that any view that does not is not fully Christian. And according to Genesis, God's creation—both the earth *and* the heavens—was good. That is, the creation was deliberately not "perfect" in the Hellenistic sense but was purposefully gifted with the possibility of genuine change and potential for development. It is to their everlasting praise that the post-apostolic fathers followed Paul's lead in his potentially lethal confrontation on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22–31).[30] Athens, being self-confessedly "ignorant" of the one true God (v. 23b), was profoundly mistaken, precisely because it was in the wrong story. The world had a beginning (v. 24; Gen. 1) and was moving toward a definitive climax under God's man, the resurrected Jesus (vv. 30–31). The real not only could change, it was designed to, and therein laid humanity's hope and destiny. On the one hand, creation was not condemned to meaningless cycles but awaited a glorious renewal. On the other, if God could create something both new and real, then surely humans, made in his image, not only could, but were expected to, imitate him.[31]

Admittedly, the logical demonstration of the non-eternity of the world would take another four and half centuries. It was achieved in AD 529 by John Philoponus, a strikingly independent thinker who broke with his earlier Aristotelian-Neoplatonic schooling and was the first ancient author to assert that Plato and Aristotle were mere humans whose works should be critiqued as such. And note the trajectory. Even though his critiques often assumed Aristotelian

ontology, it was his prior belief in Scripture that led to his questioning, very much in the vein of Tertullian, Hellenism's metaphysical speculation about the cosmos. That is, it was Scripture, with its emphasis on experience, that told him how to read the cosmos and led to his seeing a demonstration that in principle should have been obvious from the beginning. It was Jerusalem, not Athens, that allowed the cosmos to be seen for what it really was.

Sadly, other equally important implications of Jerusalem's gospel appear to have escaped the mass of later church fathers. One was the unity of creation. Since according to Genesis both the earth and the heavens were part of the one creation, both were necessarily equally real and equally changeful. Athens's imagined metaphysical division—with its long influence on subsequent Christian "theology" and "spiritual" interpretation—was mistaken. Here again it was Philoponus who first argued that the heavens and earth were created by the one God, having the same properties, and hence that the stars were not divine. It would take almost fifteen hundred years for that reality to be embraced, but those steps were eventually taken by Nicolas of Cusa, who proposed that the heavens were made of the same substances as the earth and therefore subject to the same "laws." Breaking with Hellenism's rational speculations, Copernicus and his successors began to gain genuine knowledge of the heavens and how they really worked.

Athens's metaphysical division also entailed the existence of perfect unchanging ideas. Certain theologians' presumption of perfect ideas in the mind of Israel's Yahweh only arises if one first assumes that he was better understood by idolatrous Hellenists, who did not know him (see Acts 17:16, 22–23, as discussed above), than by Moses, the prophets, and the New Testament's Lord Jesus himself. So yes, while it is as true as it is trivial to assert that the Bible does not tell us everything, this is no warrant to import into Christian theology Hellenistic speculations, born as they are of a false cosmology, a demonstrably false priority of calculative "reason," and a flawed principle of reasoned analogy. But in Genesis there are no such fixed and "perfect" ideas—not in the mind of God, nor in Scripture, nor in his creation.[32] Nor is there any hint of Yahweh's frustration with imperfections in his creation arising from either his lack of skill or the perverse intractability of matter. There is only God's affirmation of his creation of physical "kinds" (Gen. 1:11–12, 21, 24–25)—something like what we today would call species—in all their particular and wondrous diversity, and all gifted with freedom to adapt and change around a basic plan.

The implications for human creativity are significant. As Athenian artists and architects strove to express the perfect form, their culture increasingly stagnated. But designers today speak of "wicked problems":[33] design questions for which there is no single, "perfect" answer (read Platonic "form"). Instead, reality as it actually presents itself allows for manifold correct solutions. Over against Aristotle's "fixed orders of nature," there is instead the indeterminacy of creative art directed toward change (not unlike God's undetermined creative acts in Genesis). There is no such thing as a single perfect aircraft, smart watch, film, essay, painting, piece of music, or ideal word of counseling to which one must attain. It, too, would take long centuries, but once freed from bondage to Athens's hypothetical single perfect forms, human creativity would experience a massive flourishing, as would our understanding of the shifting dynamics of bio-diversity in the world God actually made.[34]

Basic to all this is another of Jerusalem's striking cosmological innovations. Standing in radical and emphatic opposition to the entire ancient world, Jerusalem held that God and his creation were distinct entities. Creation was not divine, nor did it participate in God's (or any other putatively divine) "being" whether by emanation or analogy—it is doubtful if the latter is even a coherent notion. Creation had its own integrity. It had what Duns Scotus would later describe as its own particular and individual

"thisness" (haeccity).[35] In unequivocally divesting creation of "divinity," that is, "disenchanting" it, Jerusalem paved the way for modern science and all its manifold benefits. But this is not to reduce creation merely to meaningless stuff.

According to Scripture, creation, as God's handiwork, had its own truth, beauty, and goodness—God did not "declare" creation to be good but "*saw* that it was good."[36] No longer under the bondage of being feared, placated, worshipped, or elided in the search for "cosmic" unchanging truth, creation was set free to be studied, tested, and understood for what it was, and its extraordinary potential for flourishing nurtured and realized. The explosion of knowledge and creativity that the West and now the rest of the world has witnessed in the last four hundred years is largely the consequence of Jerusalem's triumph over Athens.

Jerusalem's cosmology is able, therefore, to transcend both the Scylla of idolizing creation and the Charybdis of reducing it to a meaningless nominalism (bearing in mind that the latter arises only if one first assumes Hellenic ontological speculations). On the one hand, far from idolizing creation, to affirm its inherent goodness is to honour Yahweh's own assessment. Creation's goodness is not autonomous but instead reflects God's intention as the one who constantly upholds it by his authoritative and sustaining word. On the other hand, far from meaningless nominalism, this irreducibly material creation, as God's good temple—designed to house his presence and humans as his image[37]—is sacred and is heading toward its eventual liberation and renewal. So while clearly not to be worshipped—that belongs to God alone—and equally clearly not participating in his being, creation is nevertheless a deeply meaningful place, precisely because God made it so. And since creation was intended by God to be a flourishing garden, whose rich bounty we are to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17; see also Isa. 6:3: "the fullness of the earth is God's glory," my translation), all of creation is itself properly seen as a sacrament, that is, a means by which God's gracious and good gifts of blessing and life come to us.[38] To say that humanity does not live by bread alone is not to diminish bread. On the contrary, it implicitly affirms bread as God's good gift through which we continue to enjoy his gift of life.

In concluding this section, I offer an observation and a question. First, the implications of Jerusalem's cosmology are staggering and, when finally taken seriously, world changing. Second, we might ask, how do we, as historians, explain the origin of such extraordinary insights over three and half thousand years ago—nearly a millennium before Athens's greatness—and that in flat contradiction to every other surrounding culture?[39]

How We Come to Know (Epistemology)

Athens knew early on about observation. Homer's *histor* resolved disputes because he was someone who knew, and he knew because he had seen and heard (see *Iliad* 18.501; 23.486).[40] But as we saw, Athens's subsequent "reasoning" led to the conviction that one could never learn the truth by attending to the changeful world. So for Plato, "when the soul makes use of the body for any investigation, either through seeing or hearing or any of the other senses, then it is dragged by the body to things which never remain the same, and it wanders about and is confused and dizzy like a drunken man because it lays hold upon such things" (*Phaedo* 79c). What mattered was for the mind to apprehend unchanging ideas and so to transcend unreal and misleading physical appearances.

This is why I find it difficult to see how one can be a Platonist and a Christian.[41] Platonism is necessarily committed to the view that God's actions in history and, finally, the incarnation must be, by their very nature, misleading and distorting shadows.[42] One wonders if this is why such theologians tend to spend most of their time discussing philosophical theology and the idea of "God" and rather less studying the Gospels and the incarnate historical Jesus described therein. To my mind this stands

in direct contradiction to Jesus's own claim that to have seen him is to have seen the Father (John 14:8–10). One might suppose that John carelessly omitted several requisite paragraphs of regulatory fine print—an oversight now made good by later apophatic theologians—whereby Jesus warned against the improper use of his claim, such as one hears in modern American TV drug advertisements. Or, far more likely, there was no need for such caveats because John's Jesus meant exactly what he said. That which ordinary (that is, philosophically untrained) people see and hear in the historical, first-century Jesus of John's Gospel is a faithful and true account of Israel's God—no apophatic caveats needed.

The same hesitation is also evident even in Aristotle. Although known for his extensive observations, once he had imagined a coherent "rational" explanation, there was no need to go back and test it against the changeful world he had originally observed. While his claim that heavier objects fall proportionately faster than lighter ones reflected casual observation, more importantly, it allowed him to avoid the theoretical problems around motion raised by the Eleatics, Heraclitus, and the atomists.[43] The point remains, though, that for Aristotle, the real test of truth was the rationality of the explanation, not whether it survived deliberate experimental testing.

Consequently, Athens stood, as it were, for eight centuries holding aloft two objects, lighter and heavier, and it never occurred to anyone to test Aristotle's "explanation" by dropping them, not least because from Athens's point of view, it would have been irrational to do so. It was precisely because experiment contradicted the principle of Aristotelian "reasoned" demonstration that the later Galen, "the father of anatomy," rejected his early dalliance with experiment as illogical.[44] Celsus, too, rejected Christian teaching because it was similarly based on "empiricism" and not abstract logical demonstration. This is why Athens was so good at demonstrating the logic of geometry and, for the very same reason, why Aristotelian science contributed almost nothing substantial to our knowledge of how the world actually worked. Paul, on the other hand, although not rejecting thought, proclaimed a demonstration based on the present and this-worldly experience of the Spirit and power—a contradiction in terms for Athens. He believed in Jesus, not because of dialectical reasoning from first principles, but because of his life-shattering historical, sensory encounter with the resurrected Christ, through whom he received the eternal-life giving Spirit.

In the later Hellenistic church, once again it took the illustrious John Philoponus to refute Aristotle's "rational demonstration" that heavier objects fall faster than lighter ones, and he did so by experiment. As both Arthur Koestler's *The Sleepwalkers* (1959) and Steven Weinberg's *To Explain the World: The Discovery of Modern Science* (2015) conclude, it was not until the West rejected the metaphysical speculations of Plato and Aristotle—as Philoponus adumbrated a thousand years earlier—that a genuinely explanatory science as we know it could develop.

Similar speculation informed Hellenism's figurative or allegorical hermeneutics. Just as they employed "reason" to discern the truth "above" the changeful and misleading appearances of the material world, so too with Athens's foundational texts. Allegorical interpretation allowed the philosophers to "see through" ancient Homer's and Hesiod's mythical "logoi" and to discern the hidden rational "logos" above them. Homer, it turned out, was in fact a Stoic . . . or a Neoplatonist, depending on the prior philosophical convictions of his interpreter. But the cheat is evident. Far from being readers of Homer, the philosophers were hermeneutical ventriloquists who made Homer their talking doll. Reverse engineering ancient allegory, they became grammatical puppeteers, manipulating him through a range of semantic tricks to make him mouth their own philosophies.

Hellenistically formed church fathers at times assumed a similar stance toward

Israel's Scriptures. In the mortal struggle with classical pagans, the same allegorical ventriloquism enabled them to transcend what they felt to be the crude and problematic particulars of the ethnically narrow Jewish Bible. It stood to "reason" that one had to look past the mere "appearance" of the Old Testament's "fleshly" literal "words" (*logoi*) to find the true "spiritual" life-giving eternal and unchanging Logos (Jesus) behind them. The antiquity and truth of Christianity could now be demonstrated, since in the hands of the properly trained allegorist, Jesus was to be found on every Scripturally difficult high place and for some even under every textually straightforward spreading tree.

One can see why this intellectually elite and learned exercise might appeal to those Hellenistic fathers of the church for whom Athens's philosophy was the pinnacle of wisdom.[45] But there are at least three significant problems. First, the entire enterprise is based on a non-Scriptural and mistaken ontology. Second, it again implies that later Hellenistic church fathers were better and more enlightened readers of Israel's Scriptures than either Jesus or the New Testament authors who knew him best—their readings are consistently literal (i.e., in keeping with the literary genre).[46] And, third, the direction of reading is the opposite of Jesus and his first followers. They did not need to read him "back" into Israel's Scriptures; as Yahweh among us, he was already there (1 Cor. 8:6; see also Deut. 6:4). Instead, as their frequent use of "fulfillment" language indicates, this was about reading forward into the realization of Yahweh's promised return (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1 in Mark 1:2–3). So, as spiritual as it might sound, and although there is clearly a sense of climax, it is nevertheless a mistake to posit a kind of "spiritual" hermeneutical rupture, as though something radically "other" had transpired. Israel's story had always been about Yahweh's irruptive descent to his people (e.g., Sinai), and that is precisely what happened in Jesus.

Jerusalem's distinctive epistemology arises from its fundamentally different view of creation. Since the world and its changefulness is real, the emphasis lies instead on observation—what we see and touch and handle (to quote John)—and "testing" (i.e., proof).[47] We do not learn about either God or his world by guessing on the basis of what seems reasonable to us. On the contrary, we learn by attending to how God actually chose to make both his creation and himself known. Hence Yahweh's self-revelation in the Exodus (7:5, 17; 8:10; 9:29; 16:12; etc.) and the incarnation depend on historical encounter *and* "testing" in order to reveal who he really is (e.g., Mark 9:10–12; John 9:13–33; 20:20–27). One learns about God, and comes to the astounding realization of Jesus's true identity, on the basis of what is observed and "proved" by experience, whether in controlling the sea or enabling the forgiven lame man to walk. Far from an obstacle to be overcome, for Jerusalem, functioning senses are essential to our being made in God's image and to learning about him and his world (Exod. 4:11). The mark of being loved by God and being in relationship with him is that one sees and hears. It is the idols who have eyes and who cannot see, as do all those who worship them (Pss. 115, 135). For Jerusalem, then, the only reason humans cannot see what is in front of their eyes is their idolatry (see John 5:44; 14:11). What blinded Athens was, in my view, its idolatrous commitment to the preeminent sufficiency of reason. To repeat, this is not to exclude thought, but instead to put reason in its rightful place (as the Enlightenment and Wittgenstein much later concurred): look first, think second, and then test one's ideas by looking again. And it was not just this; *how* one looked also mattered. As Mark Strom has argued and Augustine earlier intuited, the trust, hope, and care of 1 Corinthians 13 are more than mere morality; they represent a new way of knowing that was radically relational.[48]

Thus, for Jerusalem, there is no tension between the physical senses and knowing God. In fact, it is precisely those senses (not

"faith") that register the physical and historical signs of his reality, power, and gracious presence and thus character (see Rom 1:19–22). Two important points flow from this. First, in Jerusalem's epistemology, the senses are both necessary and reliable in accessing the truth about creation. The truly critical step toward modern science had been taken. Second, this combination of the goodness and reality of the earth and heavens, and of the God-given image-bearing status of our senses, explains why the Scriptures never saw the need for a Hellenistic metaphysics.

In Athens's two-tiered reality, physics dealt with being that changed, and metaphysics with speculations about the necessarily unchanging being that was the first cause. But this was not Jerusalem's conceptualization and hence not its problem. First, the one true creator had come down into Israel's world to be accessible to their senses. They did not have to ascend out of it to know him (Deut. 30:12). Second, the Scriptures nowhere speculate about the "nature" of eternal "spirit" because it was largely irrelevant. They simply had the confidence that Yahweh, having made the changefully gifted world, us, and our senses, was surely able to express faithfully and without distortion his power, wisdom, and character (see again John 14:8–11).

Now it is true that Scripture sometimes speaks of the need to understand things on the basis of the unseen world (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:18). But it is clear from the context that Paul is simply appealing to the Jewish hope of eternal glory that awaits its incarnate and sensory revelation at the end (see Phil. 3:20). This is hardly Hellenism's dualism.

God (Theology)

For Athens, Homer's original gods were essentially very large Greeks who engaged in the entire range of proud, vindictive, selfish, and foible-driven behaviours of their human creators. An affront to later philosophers, the ancient poets were rebuked and their divinities either allegorized or photoshopped into something deemed more befitting their status. But just as Athens's increasing reliance on the compulsory logic of human reason necessarily resulted in a cosmos that was equally rigid, eternal, and unchanging, so too their conception of the ultimate deity. It necessarily became an impersonal and impassible abstraction, a victim and prisoner of its own rigid rationality. This applied equally to Plato's enigmatic and essentially unknowable *nous* (Intellect), Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, and the Stoics' impersonal, impassible, and unfeeling cosmic logos. So, for example, "[God is] incorporeal, one, immeasurable, begetter of everything, . . . blessed and beneficent, the best, in lack of nothing, himself bearing all things, celestial, ineffable, unnamable, and as he himself says, 'invisible, unconquerable' . . . whose nature is difficult to find and if found cannot be expressed among the many" (Plato, *Timaeus* 28e; Apuleius, *On the Teaching of Plato* 1.5). Aristotle asserted that "humans cannot be friends with god or love Zeus," for no matter how pious an individual might be, the inequality was simply too great for there to be any reciprocity.[49] For the Epicureans, it was inconceivable that the gods would sully their elevated existences with any interest in the tawdry doings of humans.

For Jerusalem, things were different. First, since there is only the one creator Yahweh, Israel had no conception of divinity *per se*. There are no other "divinities," only Yahweh the creator and judge of all. This is why, for example, Mark's Gospel refuses to use any of the traditional Hellenistic words for the divine.[50] Such notions had no place in Israel's worldview.

Second, since he was not the product of human imagination, he was neither all too human nor an elevated expression of impersonal reason. As intimated above, Yahweh's self-introductory "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:14) means, essentially, "You have never met a god like me, so do not guess. Instead, look, listen, and learn." This explains the previously noted thoroughgoing emphasis on the senses throughout the Exodus. Since one learns about persons primarily through what they do and

say over time, the fundamental structure of Israel's knowledge of God was not "reasoned" but necessarily narratival.[51] This is why Jerusalem never indulges in self-reliant reason's predilection to speculate. Not only did Yahweh forbid it, but since no human has seen or handled imaginative constructs such as "natures" or "essences," let alone the realm of "spirit," how can we possibly test our ideas against them?

Third, far from the various philosophical versions of Athens's distant and inaccessible "deities," Jerusalem's one true God was profoundly engaged with his creation, especially humans, about whom he cared a great deal. He had come down and not only revealed his just and mercifully compassionate character to the masses but gave them his name as well. He inclusively desired that all of his people, from the least to the greatest, learn to trust him so that they might enjoy his creation and flourish. While the Exodus certainly demonstrated Yahweh's creatorly power and authority over all, it was his overwhelming predisposition to compassion and mercy, even in the face of disobedience, that took centre stage (Exod. 33:17–19; 34:5–9).

Thus in the climax of Israel's narrative, Yahweh's character was most fully expressed, not in a bloodied, vengeful Augustus towering over his fallen foe, but in the shameful weakness and philosophical folly of an all-too-physical Jesus and him crucified (1 Cor. 1:22–24). Here was a God who embraced death in order to bring life to his creation (John 3:16), especially humanity, even those at enmity with him (Rom. 8:19–23; 5:6–8). It is not difficult to see why Israel's Yahweh—with his deep and abiding love for and attention to humans, expressed finally in the incarnate and crucified Lord, John's "I AM"—was such an affront.

As scandalous now as he was then, this same Jesus, as we saw earlier, claimed that to have seen him—a first-century rural Palestinian Jew—was to have seen the Father. Nothing could be further from the mind of a culture founded almost entirely on the elite exercise of power, whether political, social, or intellectual, and where the path to truth required one to ignore the world of culture and history. This might explain why, for well over a thousand years, both Jesus's Jewishness and the fundamental narrative epistemology of the Gospels was largely irrelevant to most serious theological discussions of who he was and what he intended.

For all his problems, Origen on this point fully grasped the fundamental difference between Athens and Jerusalem. When the pagan apologist Celsus demanded that the Christian faith meet the test of Greek philosophical proofs, Origen responded by inquiring, whatever gave Celsus the idea that Christianity was a philosophy, or even an idea? Christians did not arrive at their beliefs by employing first principles, thinking their way upward to some eternal reality. Christians began with history, with God's utterly unreasonable—confounding now both Jewish and Greek expectations—and complete self-revelation in a crucified Jesus. Ours was not an ascending dialectic initiated by self-reliant, elite human reason, but instead a humble response to God's condescending love.[52] The point is important: nowhere in Scripture is the truth about God ever arrived at on the basis of abstract human reason. To paraphrase Paul (Gal. 3:3), if our historical Jerusalemite "faith" in Christ and subsequent experience of his Spirit did not begin with the reasoned speculation of elite Athenian "flesh," what makes us think that we will come to perfection in that way?

Christians did not arrive at their beliefs by employing first principles, thinking their way upward to some eternal reality. Christians began with history . . .

Society (Sociology)

Based on the same reliance on the fixed hierarchical logic of reason, Athens's view of society naturally mimics its cosmology.

Reflecting an unchanging and eternal hierarchy of emanations from the perfect origin to the increasingly distorted inferior levels, Plato's *Republic* likewise describes a static hierarchy with superior aristocratic families, dominated by elite males with their long genealogies, presiding over increasingly inferior (not quite human) women, artisans, slaves, and barbarians in something approximating that order. In Athens's regimented world, neither real change nor real difference was an option, or even imaginable, precisely because it was illogical. Women were common to all men, provided they were of the appropriate status; children ought not to know their fathers; and defective offspring and unwanted embryos were to be discarded. From our modern perspective, the parallels with oppressive totalitarian states are chillingly obvious. But for the Greeks and Romans, the sacred image of the Republic and the corporate was inviolable. The individual had no intrinsic value: one's worth was based solely in one's relationship to the clan, the city, and ultimately the empire, itself the product of and sustained by the gods and the deterministic reasoned logos behind them. This is why refusing to offer a pinch of incense to the genius of the emperor was no mere political act. It was to the Romans an inconceivable, irrational, and deeply alarming repudiation of the entire ontological fabric of the ancient world.

In this new community, indwelt by God's creative, life-giving Spirit, traditional classical distinctions based on race, gender, and social standing were swept away.

But for Jerusalem, not only creation but also human society was gifted with change. In Christ, not only we, but all things had been made new. Hence Paul, taking up and subverting this Hellenistic model of the body politic, could now declare that it was no longer privileged aristocrats with their long genealogies but a crucified servant Christ who is the head (1 Cor. 12). And everything else—eye, foot, hand—is gift. In this new community, indwelt by God's creative, life-giving Spirit, traditional classical distinctions based on race, gender, and social standing were swept away. In Christ and his Spirit-indwelt family, there is no longer Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free (Gal. 3:28). In Jerusalem's household, all the families of the earth were united (Ephesians). As brothers and sisters, everyone, being made in God's image, was of equal value. It was Jerusalem that envisioned the first truly open society based on true freedom, a freedom that was genuine precisely because it was grounded in the creator God's merciful and just character. This is one of the reasons the Roman world found Christians so disturbing, offensive, and irrational: they embodied difference in a world where reason declared there could be none.

It is easy for us in a pluralistic modern democracy—where everyone, at least in theory, is expected to enjoy equal rights—to fail to grasp just how radical were Paul's words. His was a world where men held all the advantages over women, masters held all the advantages over slaves, and Jew and non-Jew generally regarded each other with thinly veiled hostility. Christians became the first movement in history to break the link between a particular city, ethnicity, empire, culture, or religion and what we now call human rights. All were to be loved, all to be treated equally, and when they gathered, much to the chagrin of the later Julian the Apostate, everyone's opinion mattered. Women could speak on God's behalf, and slaves become bishops. For the first time in human history, there appeared in these ancient fractured cities a new community where regardless of ancestry, status, or gender, all broke bread around a common table. And that was the case solely because of the story of Jesus, itself the climax of Israel's narrative. Aristotle, as MacIntyre recognizes, would have been horrified.[53]

This is why the New Testament insists that we are all children of Abraham, the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; Rom. 11:13–24). Of course this does not at all mean we must all become ethnic Jews; this is precisely what Galatians, Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, and to some extent Philippians are at pains to deny. Nevertheless, we are called into the narrative of the family of Yahweh—with its radically different cosmology, epistemology, and theology—without which, as Paul argues in Acts 17, we really will remain ignorant.

Being Human (Anthropology) and Moral Vision (Ethics/Virtue)

All of this, of course, speaks to anthropology: what does it mean to be human? Personality was not well conceived of in the ancient world. Of the over one thousand known Hellenistic writers, not one produced a sustained introspective examination of anthropology, human psychology, or personality.[54]

To Athens, ever since Pythagoras, we owe the remarkable and incredibly resilient idea of the battle between the soul and the body. Early Greek writers loved the wordplay between *sōma* (= body) and *sēma* (= tomb): the body was a tomb to be escaped. For the philosophers, only the truly fine substance of the rational soul mattered. The only reason for having a soul was its eventual self-absorption into the cosmos. Thus, for these Pythagoreans, at death, the pure soul—which, remember, for the later Aristotle has its own reality and stuff—would experience its glorious liberation from its "mortal coil" and fly upward. But how did one achieve this status? That depended on how well one purified one's soul.

Traditionally, Athenian behaviour began with Homer's virtues. Essentially a matter of male virility, they focused on bravery and success in battle, physical perfection and lordly bearing, and the ability to employ persuasive rhetoric, as exemplified in the wily and well-spoken Odysseus.[55] But as Athens soon discovered, these Homeric heroes needed to be restrained. Taking up Socrates's injunction to know one's station in life, Aristotle's "nothing-to-excess" ethics were in part an attempt to reduce conflict within and between the various Greek city-states. Ethics and justice thus meant conforming to the cultural golden mean in support of the status quo. As it had been for Plato, the gentlemanly great-souledness of the later Stoics was primarily focused on individuals perfecting themselves in preparation for liberating death.

As reason brought order to an apparently unruly and changeful world, so too it subdued changeful human emotion. The emotionally deprived Stoic pursued *apatheia*, learning to accept what was. There was no conception of seeking to fully realize human potential. (That the Reformers drunk deeply of the Stoic Seneca might also say something about their often emotionally placid worship.) Unimaginable in one's life, transforming the lives of others was both irrational and immoral because it was contrary to reason and attended to the weak, when reason demanded instead the celebration of the great and the good and the strong.

But for Jerusalem, not only was God himself a person, but every human being was made in his image. Several revolutionary changes flow from this. Perhaps the most significant is that humans are psychosomatic unities where the soul, meaning something like the essential personal self, cannot be conceived of apart from the body. Pythagoras's long-running battle between body and soul was a mistake. Since the body was essential to our being made in God's image, it was destined—much to the scandal of the philosophers—for a glorified and emphatically material future. It was not just that the body was for the Lord; even more astonishingly, the Lord was for the body (1 Cor. 6:13). Paul is here simply drawing on Yahweh's earlier declarations. Made in his image, every human being was designed to house his personal presence, which meant, as Psalm 8 had long before Homer declared, that to be human was to be the pinnacle of God's creation,

just a little lower than God himself. That some theologians continue to speak of the incarnation as an act of self-humiliation probably says less about the Scriptural view than it does their continued commitment to Athens's long suspicion of the body. Understandably, this high view of humanity also caused great offence. Pagan apologists regularly complained that Christians gave far too much attention to humans. It might still come as a surprise to some, but it was Jerusalem and the Christians that were the first emphatic humanists. Christ's incarnation and resurrection had raised humanity to unimaginable heights. And not only in the world to come: Jesus's healings and resurrection in the present age had shown that the body was clearly to be respected and treated with a dignity befitting its true status in *this* life. This is why, as we will see below, Christian practice and lifestyle looked like it did.

In terms of human psychology, in seeing thought and emotion as integral to God and therefore by necessity to his image, Christ, in redeeming humanity, must have redeemed both. Christians could begin to speak unashamedly of inexpressible and boundless joy in the Spirit: passion and thought could be reconciled (yes, one can be a scholar on fire, and Regent students and professors are free to raise their hands in worship and weep with joy in our chapel services as well as being overcome by God's presence in the library).

Furthermore, anyone—not just the elite—could now relate to God through an experience of the indwelling Spirit (e.g., Gal. 3:1–5). The secret to life—and notice "life," not virtue or ethics (notice John's emphasis on Jesus's gift of eternal life)—was no longer a matter of intellectual conviction as to the rightness of abstract reason, open only to those wealthy enough to afford a philosophical education and with time enough to train their thinking. Utterly oblivious of intellectual or economic status, friendship with this God required only a sincere desire for repentance (a passion not only shocking to the elites of the day but irrational, since the idea of a final judgment made no sense in a world where everything was given), trust in his grace through his incarnate Son, and openness to the promptings of his Spirit. "Salvation," therefore, was no longer an assumed aristocratic privilege or a reward owed to personal effort. True life, through friendship with God, who was good to all and had compassion on all that he had made, was now graciously available simply on the basis of trust in Christ (Eph. 2:8) and the subsequent enjoyment of the free gift of the Spirit. It is precisely this difference that prompted Paul to point out to the elites in his Corinthian congregation that the Greek conception of knowledge "puffs up"—not least when they go beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6), which I take to mean speculation that goes beyond what Scripture says[56]—whereas God's love builds up (1 Cor. 8:1).

Christian behaviour was determined, not by Homeric virtue or Aristotelian ethics—which are not Christian ideas—but by Christian morality. Although they are all too often confused, they are not the same, as Nietzsche well understood. Christian behaviour was emphatically not a matter of elite philosophical self-imposed and self-focused rigour, but instead of the fruits of the indwelling Spirit, which, in contrast, are interpersonal and others-directed. Hence the three great Christian pillars of society are trust, not in one's own abilities but in Christ/God; hope (not optimism), as a sure and certain conviction of Jesus's resurrection and God's ultimate victory; and a self-sacrificing love of God and care for neighbour.

It is no surprise that every aspect of Paul's life and message undermined the pagan economy of honour and excellence. Hence his avoidance of Aristotle's core term "virtue" (*arête*) and his radical transvaluation of ambitious "wisdom" (*phronēsis*) to the imitation of Chris's self-humbling refusal to grasp after his rightful rank of equality with God (Phil. 2:5; see also 2:2–3; 3:15, 19).[57] Paul refused to play the manipulative rhetor, who employed his intellectual

abilities and practiced posturing to make himself look lofty, learned, and wise. In keeping with his gospel, Paul deliberately chose to make his "entrance" in weakness, fear, and much trembling. He refused the Corinthians' honour-enhancing patronage. He scandalized them by working with his hands, something only sub-humans did, in order that they might enjoy the free gift of God's life. And he did this in a world where no gift ever came without strings.

Joyfully rejecting the lofty withdrawal of the self-contained and unruffled intellectual, Paul engaged passionately with all, no matter from what walk of life. Throwing off all pretense, he was ruthlessly transparent as to his motives and personal struggles (2 Corinthians). If the gospel could relate Christ's "shameful" personal struggle in the garden, then how could Jesus's followers ever pretend to untroubled sophistication? Far from a closed Hellenistic ethics interested in preserving the equilibrium of the unchanging status quo, Jerusalem offered a radical freedom in Christ that regularly resulted in extraordinarily excessive acts of transforming compassion, generosity, and self-giving. In this mode, and with the hope of the resurrection ensuring their future, Christians no longer needed to fear death, nor engage in the socially destructive patterns of "self-preservation at all costs" that characterized the ancient world.

It was precisely this that astonished Galen of Pergamum, the second-century father of anatomy, personal physician to Commodus and Septimius Severus, and a man of vast learning and rhetorical skill. The first pagan philosopher to treat Christianity as an equal, he did so, not because of Christianity's intellectual sophistication: he thought it was impudent rubbish. What astonished him was Christianity's transforming power, and that among the less than human masses.[58] There is thus good "reason" why the New Testament looks so different from elite Greco-Roman literature and why the Christians succeeded in transforming popular culture where philosophy had failed: it operated from very different "philosophical" assumptions and was fueled not by self-effort aimed at perfecting one's inherent qualities, but by the Spirit and his gifts.

The Transforming Character of Christian Practice and Lifestyle[59]

This brings us, finally, to the transforming character of Christian practice and lifestyle, which would have been impossible and incomprehensible without the previous radical shifts in outlook.

The Gospel and Women

Consider, for example, the case of women. One of the staggering things often passed over in silence by ancient historians is the question of why women enjoyed far higher status among Christians than in the rest of the pagan world. The reason appears at least twofold: the elevation of sexual morality, and the realization that, as beneficiaries of the Son of God's death *and* recipients of God's Holy Spirit, women shared a fundamental equality with men.

At most society meals, good women would leave early since staying on would indicate their availability for the after-dinner sexual sport: indulging the appetites of both stomach and genitalia was part and parcel of first-century life (as Paul's Corinthian correspondence reveals).[60] But at Christian meals, women, far from being reduced to sexual objects, could be both the voice of the community *to God* in prayer, and the voice *of God* to the community through prophecy. (Then, as now, Pentecostalism has been a major force in democratization). Eventually, women like Junia, Priscilla, and Phoebe would become apostles, teachers, and leaders of house churches. Of particular interest is the number of women ministers who were martyred, which, when compared to the number of men, suggests that many enjoyed positions of high standing in the churches. This is a far cry from the traditional Greek perspective where, although women were generally considered to be above slaves, they were of less intrinsic worth than a boy who himself was only an "incomplete male."[61]

Women were no longer to be seen as pawns in patriarchal power structures. When Paul enjoins that if a man wants to be an elder he was to be husband of but one wife, his concern is not divorce but the standard practice of men having several women. Whereas pagans and Christians both prized female chastity, Christians differed in utterly rejecting the double standard that allowed men to have as many women as they pleased. Prospective leaders in Paul's churches were expected to take a stand against the cultural norms, honouring their wives as Christ had loved the church. There was to be no having of a woman's body unless you had first promised her your life-long and self-giving commitment to her and to her alone. The Christian woman thus not only enjoyed far greater marital security and equality than her pagan neighbour, she also married later, with all the positive consequences for childbirth and emotional maturity. She was also given a greater degree of choice. The positive strengthening effect this Christian innovation had on marriages, and thus the family and society at large, can hardly be overstated.

First-century women were attracted in vast numbers to Christianity because of Jesus and his apostle, Paul. Yes, Paul, whose voice is the first ever in the literature to argue so strongly for the interdependent equality of men and women in Christ who had died and been raised equally for both.[62] Let it be abundantly clear: no movement on earth has been as supportive of women as Christianity—even with its numerous later blemishes due in no small part to a recidivist Hellenistic cultural conservatism.

The Gospel and Slavery[63]

The life and teachings of Jesus had a similar impact of the eradication of slavery. While slavery had existed in every great civilization, Greece and Rome produced the first true slave societies. And no Hellene seriously questioned it. Plato in his ideal Republic had slaves, and Aristotle in his *Politics* argued that slavery was good for all concerned, since some people were born to lead and others to serve. This is not to say that individual slaves could not do well. Not every slave had a horrid existence. But very many did.

Slaves were used for everything, including pretty boys for homosexual entertainment—they sold for more than fields in Rome—and girls for brothels. The only reason that we today abhor this as child abuse is the gospel. Buyers became expert in purchasing for the desired qualities. Many senators had more than a thousand slaves, including cripples who were bought solely to amuse guests. Military victories flooded slave markets, like those at Delos and Capusa, which were capable of holding twenty thousand a day, and often ran at full capacity. They supplied large slave-run plantations, where most were worked in chains. Slaves were cared for as long as they were productive; once they became old or infirm, they were left to perish alone in a ditch by the road. The mines were worse, consuming slaves at an appalling rate. Athens had more than thirty thousand slaves in its silver mines, and Rome hundreds of thousands. They were worked under the lash day and night, without respite or indulgence, until they collapsed from exhaustion or illness, to die in torment. As the Roman historian Diodorus noted, "Their misery is so great that death is welcomed more than life." According to Mary Gordon, "The growth of the empire was undergirded by human suffering which is unimaginable in degree or extent." And no Roman really cared. There were always more where they came from. And yet for such "enlightened" intellectuals as Edward Gibbon and Friedrich Engels, slavery was the necessary price for the glories of Greece and Rome.

But in the Christian world it was different, partly because the Jewish Torah was more merciful toward slaves, partly because both Jews and Christians did not despise labour, and partly because all were made in God's image. After all, in Genesis 1, doing the work of the garden was integral to bearing God's image in his good creation. For this reason, Christianity had nothing to do

with people who paraded their leisured and idle curiosity (2 Thess. 3:11). If one did not labour, one did not eat (v. 10). According to the turn-of-the-century *Didache* (12), a Christian was not to be without an occupation. Christians also restored both marriage and family to slaves. Masters were expected to legitimate a slave's marriage, and their children granted paternity. Sex with the wife of a slave was regarded as if one had committed adultery with the wife of a prince.[64] In pagan cemeteries, the inscriptions always noted the interned's servile status; even in death they were marked. But on Christian graves there was no distinction.

Whereas pagan slave masters would allow slaves to buy their freedom at market value on receipt of their painfully amassed savings, Christians were encouraged to grant slaves freedom as an act of charity. And while wholesale manumission of slaves was frequent in antiquity—but only on the occasion of the owner's death, when there was no longer any financial risk[65]—only Christians went to the outrageous extreme of releasing all their slaves *during* their own lifetime, often at great cost to their personal fortunes. At the beginning of the fifth century, one Roman multi-millionaire granted liberty to so many thousands of her slaves that her biographer could not give their exact number.

The Gospel and Children

Not surprisingly, Christians also had a very different view of children. Due to abortion and, most commonly, exposure, males outnumbered females by 30 percent. Outside any ancient city, the rubbish dumps were littered with baby carcasses in various states of decay, worried by the roaming dogs and birds. Until named by their fathers, newborns had no status. Those exposed, mainly females, were left to the devices of slavers and owners of houses of prostitution looking for potential product.

But for Christians, life was God's gift. It was precisely because Jesus said "Permit the children to come to me" and used the metaphor of children when he spoke of the kingdom that the early Christians broke rank with their pagan neighbours. The consequences were dramatic. Because Christian families did not expose their girls and since contraception was discouraged—children were after all God's good gift—they rapidly out-bred the pagans.

The Gospel and Generosity[66]

All this was backed by an extraordinary generosity. Indeed some historians argue that it was the generosity of Christians that proved to be one of the most significant reasons for Christianity's over-running of paganism. Tolerated in a woman, mercy, kindness, and compassion were generally despised in a man, being seen as defects in character, not least because they were to varying degrees irrational. If the universe expressed the rational logos, helping someone who did not deserve or earn it was contrary to justice. Now it would be silly to suggest that Christians introduced good works, or were alone concerned for the poor. Roman emperors often helped disaster-struck cities—though mostly for their own honour and to buy loyalty. Even so, the Roman Empire was no welfare state.

Some historians argue that it was the generosity of Christians that proved to be one of the most significant reasons for Christianity's over-running of paganism.

For the Christian, however, "The Lord is good to all, and has compassion on all he has made" (Ps. 145:9 NET). In their Scriptures, care for the widow and orphan was mandated over and over again, and failure to do so was regarded by the prophets as one of the principle reasons for Israel's exilic judgment. Jesus continued this line, emphasizing the need to care for the poor and to store up treasures in heaven. He sternly warned those who trusted in the uncaring accumulation of riches. In an act unparalleled

in the ancient world, not only did he wash his disciples' feet—staggering and offensive beyond words—he instructed them to have the same attitude. In giving his life as a ransom for many, he surpassed and confounded the highest of the ancient world's ideals of friendship by dying even for his enemies. Remembering this concern for the poor was the one thing the Jerusalem "pillars" asked of Paul, which he himself was eager to do (Gal. 2:10).

For Christians, themselves shown mercy and grace even though manifestly undeserving, life was not primarily about justice, but rather love. The very notion that one should love God in the Christian sense was remarkable enough; that this God should love them was breathtaking. Here was a God unlike any the ancient world had ever known, a God who was not primarily defined by his power but by his self-sacrificing love. With such an example, it is no surprise that Lucian of Samosata (c. 170), renowned satirist and no friend of Christianity, reputedly complained of the Christians' "unbelievably generous and open-handed attitude to everyone[;] . . . the earnestness with which the people of this religion help one another in their needs is incredible! They spare themselves nothing for this end. Their first law-maker put it into their heads that they were all brethren."[67] Aristides of Athens declared, "If the brethren have among them a man in need, and they have not abundant resources, they fast for a day or two, so as to provide the needy man with the necessary food." According to the historian Michel Riquet, "It has been calculated that at Rome in [AD] 250, under Pope Cornelius, ten thousand Christians obliged to fast could provide, from a hundred days' fasting, a million rations a year. These more or less regular offerings were supplemented by the gifts made to the church by rich converts."[68]

Charity, then, was as much a requirement of followers of Christ as prayer and godly living. One of the early church's most popular saints, St. Lawrence, was ordered to hand over the church's poor fund to the authorities. He agreed, asking for three days to do so. He then distributed the much-desired funds among Rome's poor. Gathering them together before the magistrate he declared: "These are the church's riches: these poor who are rich in faith!" It did not save him from execution.

During the terrible plagues of Galen in the second century (which claimed about 25–33 percent of the empire's population) and another a century later (which killed as many as five thousand a day in Rome alone), it was the generosity and kindness of many Christians that did much to establish the gospel's superiority over the pagan alternatives.

In many respects, Constantine's subsequent conversion was merely responding to the inevitable. The battle had already been won years earlier, when Diocletian's successor, Galerius (c. 260–311), finally admitted the futility of state-sponsored persecution against the obstinate and impossibly irrational Christians and allowed them to worship their own gods, provided they prayed for him. And the victory was accomplished without recourse to arms, terror, or political agencies. All this led Emperor Julian the Apostate (331–63), in a final and fruitless attempt to restore paganism, to order his pagan priests to match Christian generosity. He instructed that in every city "hospices should be established so that strangers may be able to praise us for our humanity, and not only those of our own religion, but all others too, if they have need. It would be shameful, when the Jews have no beggars, when the impious Galileans feed our people along with their own, that our own should be seen to lack the help we owe them."[69] It failed. Imperial dictate could not match a transformed heart and mind. No less an opponent of Christianity than Bertrand Russell understood this. Whereas the Stoics practiced indifference to their friends, it was the Christians who sought to inculcate not so much a self-centred calm but an ardent love even for the worst of people. He had to admit, "There is nothing that can be said against it."[70] And it came from the remarkable teachings of Jesus that his followers should love their enemies and pray for them.

Although there is some debate over when hospitals emerged, it seems clear that the idea of caring for the sick without regard to status was a Christian innovation. Around AD 325, early Christian documents ordered that hospitals should be built in every city of the empire. Not to be confused with their modern descendants, they were nevertheless the first step. Basil the Great of Caesarea founded general institutions of care, called Basileias. Christians also established places of refuge to shelter strangers and the sick, providing nurses, doctors, porters, and guides. They added industries to help sustain them and included arts to adorn such buildings. In a truly heroic step, houses for lepers were established in the fourth century. With little hope of a cure and much danger of contracting the disease, it is staggering that by one estimate they eventually numbered three thousand in Europe and Asia.

The Gospel and the State

This brings us to a crucial moment: the restriction of the power of the Republican state. Once the all-conquering empire, unhindered by any philosophy of genuine individual personhood, had digested the family, clan, and tribe with their peculiar deities and customs, it took on a totalitarian aspect.[71] Absent any bill of human rights, the unquestioned omni-competence of the state led to perfunctory and fitful applications of justice, notoriously wide latitude being given to provincial governors, and all manner of minor details of life coming under imperial regulation.[72] The law was largely there to serve the interests of the aristocratic elites; it was impossible to bring charges against a person of higher status. Threats, bullying, and murder were endemic.

Christians, as non-national and monotheistic proselytizers of a non-ethnic deity, constituted a profound threat to this unity. Not only did they make their own laws based on divergent principles—the first ancient origins of what moderns now celebrate as "diversity"—but as they grew in numbers, Roman emperors, who were accustomed to getting their way, were on not a few occasions withstood by early Christian bishops such as Ambrose. And the emperor blinked first. The long Western tradition of the dissenting conscience, of the right of the lone individual to speak against the state, derives from the Christian tenet that one's loyalty is owed first and foremost to a personal God, who cares about our behaviour and the powerless. The modern high regard for those who break the law because of the truth, and our emphasis on the right of individuals to be different, find their origins in Jerusalem and the early Christians. The limitation of the power of the state was one of the cardinal characteristics of Christianity. For the first time in human history, an institution emerged alongside the state that had not only carved out its own territory over which the state had no say, but did not hesitate to critique it. Whatever their later shortcomings, the early Christians understood that neither the state nor the church could flout rights or take at will.

The Gospel and Warfare

Space limitations preclude anything but a short comment on the impact of Christianity on the endemic warfare of the ancient world. Richard Dawkins's claim that religion causes wars can be debated. What is not open to discussion is whether Christianity is a primary cause of war, for the fact remains that no other movement on earth has done so much to limit armed conflict. Think of Alexander the Great (so-called) and his brutal conquests, where entire cities were reduced and the survivors sold into slavery. Julius Caesar's campaign in Gaul resulted in one and a half million dead, one million sold into slavery—all the proceeds going into his personal coffers—and a quarter of a million families left homeless, equaling the entire population of Roman Italy. And no one cared. Typically women and children were slaughtered or enslaved without thought. It took Augustine's just war theory to put limits on warfare. Non-combatants were protected. Techniques and aims came under strict

scrutiny. A conflict had to be justified in terms of the greater good and could not be carried out merely to expand empire. Now, it has not always been adhered to, but it was an extraordinary step away from the calm brutality of Alexander and Caesar.

Some Less-Than-Happy Outcomes

At the same time, lest we be carried away with a warm sense of self-congratulation, Christian engagement with the pagan world was not always a happy story. It was Alexandrian Christian monks who stripped the pagan philosopher Hypatia naked and dragged her through the streets, before killing her in front of a church, according to some by flaying and burning alive. On the other hand, the oft-repeated claim that Christians destroyed the famed Alexandrian library is open to serious question. It appears that the vast majority of the library had already either been plundered or destroyed, and, in any case, it was primarily the temple, not the books, that was the object of the demolition. But even so, it is not at all clear that such destruction is particularly Christian.

In terms of the state, the aforementioned Ambrose also refused the emperor's just request that Christians pay for the rebuilding of a synagogue they had destroyed. And Nestorian, Monophysite, Jacobite, and Byzantine Christians regularly employed imperial power against each other, laying waste one another's churches.

In terms of society and gender, it was not that long before the apostolic church's common meal was separated from what became a more formal "Eucharist" presided over by a specially created class of Christian—of course, male. In short order, too, the church was no longer seen, as Jesus and Paul taught, as the reconstitution of Israel into which Gentiles were grafted, but now as actually replacing Israel; anti-Semitism ran deep in the ancient world. The more conservative the early church became, the more quickly women found themselves marginalized, losing significant gains that the gospel had initially brought them. Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus's vision of leadership and Basil's of the monastic life both owed far more to Athens than to the New Testament, while Eusebius, in a display that might make some American right wing Christians proud, could theologize that the empire was a microcosm of heaven. Among the several reasons Julian the Apostate rejected his Christian upbringing was the unedifying spectacle of political infighting and personal rivalries among Christian bishops in his capital.

Greek philosophical categories and assumptions became so much a part of Western Christianity that Pope Benedict could declare in 2006 that

> the encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with him: *Come over to Macedonia and help us!* (cf. Acts 16:6–10)—this vision can be interpreted as a distillation of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry.[73]

Leaving aside hesitations over the allegorical exegesis of Acts 16, what does this say about Jesus, and those New Testament authors who knew him best and who took the gospel into the first-century Hellenistic world, neither of whom seemed to share this view? The implication is that the true founders of Christianity are the later third- and fourth-century Hellenistic church fathers and their pagan opponents against whom the fathers reacted.[74] And what does that say to today's burgeoning African and Asian Christians? Must they now be beholden to Hellenism's attempts at formulating later doctrine? How does one distinguish between one man's providence and another man's historical accident?

Indeed, if Hellenism's logical speculations failed so badly in explaining the world God created, why should we trust its equally

speculative metaphysics when it comes to explaining the God who made that world? Although it is sometimes claimed that the integration of Hellenistic thought with Scripture resulted in a more profound, satisfying, and comprehensive theology, might it not be just as likely, given the profound incompatibilities between worldviews, that it resulted in confusion, misunderstanding, and obfuscation? The greatest schism the church has experienced, and which persists to this day, was occasioned by attempts to explain the ontological status of Jesus and Trinity in Hellenistic metaphysical terms. Might it also be that the infiltration of Hellenic speculative metaphysics into Christian thought actually forestalled, for almost a millennium, the development of modern science, which Philoponus's writings presaged, and contributed to the later disastrous conflict in the West between science and religion (i.e., Christianity)?

In terms of mission, given that Greek philosophy also contained a potent dose of assumed Greek superiority, one might also ask to what extent this fed both the unquestioned assumption of the supremacy of Western theologizing and Western colonialism. And what about that tendency of the churches founded in this period to call their supreme leaders "Pope (Father)"? Might it also owe less to the gospel than to the emperor's pretentions to super-priest and surrogate father of all? Was it the "Spirit" that led to a gradual erosion in the Western church of, for example, the place of women—Augustine harbored doubts about them being fully God's image—or deeply seated Hellenic and Roman prejudices?

These are provocative questions, but ignoring them will not make them go away.

Nevertheless, important though they might be, none of these concerns should be allowed to overshadow the tremendous positive impact of the gospel on the classical world. That world did not end immediately, and pagan elites continued to hold power through to the sixth century. But in the end, the story of Jesus did what Judaism with its narrow view of election as ethnicity, and Greek philosophy with its reliance on human reason, were unable to do: be a force for universal revitalization, by giving its converts and the classical world—for the first time in history—their humanity, and this, by introducing them to their one true God. And it was not just humans who became new creations. The gospel also allowed the world itself to become new, freed at last to begin to realize its potential in joining in human flourishing. X

Notes

1 While there were indeed large numbers of Christians in rural areas (Thomas A. Robinson, *Who Were the First Christians? Dismantling the Urban Thesis* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017]), nevertheless, according to the New Testament, cities were the focus of the earliest missionary activity, not least because they were centres of trade and of social and political identity and influence.

2 Tim Whitmarsh's argument in *Battling the Gods* (New York: Knopf, 2015), that "atheism"—as expressed in the modern world—is ancient and was an integral part of ancient Greek culture, rests on a tendentious blurring of categories and worldviews, and a failure to properly define terms; e.g., *atheos* described anyone who held views outside the mainstream (e.g., Epicureans and Christians), including those who rejected the anthropomorphic creations of the poets but affirmed one God over all (see Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.5).

3 On this and below, see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1996).

4 See *Satire III*, 230–40, in *The Satires of Juvenal, Persius, Sulpicia and Lucilius*, trans. Rev. Lewis Evans (London: Bell & Daldy, 1869), 15–27.

5 Here I follow Edwin Judge, "The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History," in *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge*, ed. David M. Scholer (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 130–31; see also Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); cf., Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 38–44.

6 Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 91.

7 Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 180, citing *Magna Moralia*, 1208b 27–31; *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1122b 20–22.

8 C. Kavin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven: Yale

University Press, 2016), 208–9.

9 Carlin A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), cited in Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 214.

10 Joy Connolly, "Pox Populi: Catullus, in a New Translation, Glimpses Rome's Decadent Decline," review of *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition by Gaius Valerius Catullus*, trans. with commentary by Peter Green, in *Bookforum Magazine*, Dec/Jan 2006, 30.

11 See similarly, e.g., Rowe, *One True Life*.

12 E.g., C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods*.

13 See, e.g., Matt. 6:10; Rev. 21:2–3; Rom. 8:19–20.

14 Rikk E. Watts, "The New Exodus/New Creational Restoration of the Image of God," in *What Does It Mean to be Saved?*, ed. John J. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 15–41.

15 C. Kavin Rowe, "The Grammar of Life: The Areopagus Speech and Pagan Tradition," *New Testament Studies* 57 (2010): 31–50.

16 Strictly speaking, although the Scriptures form an overarching narrative, they are not a metanarrative. "Metanarrative" was coined by Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), to unmask modernity's second-order, ideologically shaped "narratives" (e.g., freedom through science, education, economics, or politics) that lie below the surface and are specifically designed to undermine traditional first-order (i.e., historical) narratives, such as the Bible. Since the Bible is neither modern nor second-order, it is misleading to deem it a metanarrative. See the useful summary in Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), xii–xv.

17 For this and what follows, though with some modifications of my own, see especially Edwin Judge's talks at Gospel Conversations, http://www.gospelconversations.com/who-are-we/edwin-judge/.

18 Tertullian used reason but also recognized its limits, particularly in the face of history. In repudiating Marcion's claim that the incarnation was unbefitting because it would imply change in a God who by definition cannot change, Tertullian responded that this cannot be a problem since the incarnation actually happened (*On the Flesh of Christ*, e.g., chaps. 4–5; see also *Against Praxeas* 10.8–9). On the long overdue need to revisit the common misrepresentation of Tertullian, see Justo L. González, "Athens and Jerusalem Revisited: Reason and Authority in Tertullian," *Church History* 1 (1974): 17–25.

19 This was the heart of Giambattista Vico's "I really only know what I myself have made" response to Descartes's "I think therefore I am." Since humanity did not make the universe, it should limit the pretensions of pure reason.

20 E.g., Deut. 1:31; 4:12; 7:19; 11:7; 29:2–3; see also Yael Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012).

21 See again Tertullian, n. 17 above.

22 E.g., Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History, History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

23 See C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and further, Elizabeth Fricker, "Telling and Trusting: Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony," *Mind* 104 (1995): 393–411.

24 González, "Athens and Jerusalem," 22–23.

25 Jeremy M. Schott, "'Living Like a Christian, but Playing the Greek': Accounts of Apostasy and Conversion in Porphyry and Eusebius," *Journal of Late Antiquity* (2008): 265.

26 It should be self-evident that this hardly means, as was once objected, that a commitment to history requires that Christians speak only in narratives.

27 Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 14.717a 34–36; see also 5.7.787b 24–26.

28 Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 19.

29 See Democritus, *Canons* frag. 11.

30 Rowe, "Grammar of Life."

31 Note the genuine human freedom implied in, e.g., Gen. 2:16–17; 1 Sam. 10:7; Eccl. 9:10; 11:9–10.

32 This is not to suggest, as some might trivially protest, that God's "ideas" are therefore "imperfect." It is, more radically, to call into question that entire grammar of conceiving reality. God's ways are surely perfect—which is a statement about his wisdom and character—but that is not to say that he has an "idea" of a "perfect" tree or creation.

33 Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," *Design Issues* 8 (1992): 5–21.

34 It is intriguing to notice the shift in conceptualizations of life from the ancient chain of being to "trees" and now to complex dynamically interacting networks, not unlike the structure of the human brain; Manuel Lima, *Visual Complexity: Mapping Patterns of Information* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011); see also "A Visual History of Human Knowledge," TED, March 2015, https://www.ted.com/talks/manuel_lima_a_visual_history_of_human_knowledge.

35 Perhaps best celebrated by Gerard Manley Hopkins, in, e.g., *God's Grandeur*, *The Windhover*, and *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*.

36 I am grateful to Loren Wilkinson for pointing out this all-important distinction.

37 Watts, "New Exodus," 15–41.

38 See also Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973).

39 On the truly disruptive nature of Israel's Scriptures, see Iain W. Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matters* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014).

40 See Aristotle, *Prior Analytics* 1.30.46a; 1.27.43a.

41 See, e.g., again Porphyry's critique of Origen in Schott, "Living Like a Christian."

42 Appeal is sometimes made to Hebrews's use of "shadow" (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). But since this is only used of the sanctuary and the law and not of the created world in general, nor of Jesus's incarnation in particular, it is clear that this is a popular selective polemical usage, hardly evidence of a consistent underlying Platonism. Similarly, Paul's reference to seeing in a mirror "dimly" (NRSV; *en ainigmati* in 1 Cor. 13:12) is sometimes taken to imply that distortion is inherent in our present, this-worldly experience via the senses. However, since Corinthian mirrors were renowned for their exceptional clarity, the issue is not the questionable quality or diminished reliability of sense perception but the difference between mediated versus fully immediate encounter—both of which presuppose the fundamental reliability of our God-given senses, in this case "sight," in the present world and the one to come (vv.12a, b).

43 See, e.g., Andrew Gregory, "Aristotle, Dynamics and Proportionality," *Early Science and Medicine* 6 (2001): 1–21. Gregory's attempted absolution of Aristotle for his failure to test his theory by even a simple experiment sounds increasingly strained in the light of Philoponus's simple disproof.

44 See further the introduction in Ian Johnston and G. H. R. Horsley, *Method of Medicine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), ix–clvii.

45 See, e.g., Susanna Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), who in several places notes Gregory's profound admiration for Athens.

46 On the oft-cited "allegorizing" of Gal. 4:24 and "typology" of 1 Cor. 10:6, given that Paul has already argued that Spirit-filled believers, as heirs of Abraham's promise, are his true heirs, the former simply recognizes a distinction that is already evident in the literal reading of Gen. 21. In the latter, the typology as "moral example" concerns Israel's disobedience, not Christ. See further Watts, "How Do You Read? God's Faithful Character as the Primary Lens for the NT Use of the OT," in *Essays in Honor of Greg Beale: From Creation to New Creation—Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 204, 212–13.

47 The "testing" at Meribah in Exod. 17 concerns an indictable refusal to believe in spite of overwhelming previously given sensory evidence.

48 Mark Strom, "'To Know as We Are Known': Locating an Ancient Alternative to Virtues," in *Wise Management in Organisational Complexity*, ed. Mike J. Thompson and David Bevan (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave McMillian, 2013), 85–105. Strom provides a welcome corrective to Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* 2nd. ed. (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1984), which he suggests oversimplifies in missing the radical vision of Paul and in reducing "the tensions and contradictions that arguably constitute the dynamics of western thought" (86).

49 See note 7.

50 M. Eugene Boring, "Markan Christology: God-Language for Jesus?," *New Testament Studies* 45, no. 4 (October 1999): 451–71. Sometimes Rom. 1:20 and 2 Pet. 1:4 are cited as justifying Christian use of the classical terminology "divine nature" (NRSV). But care is needed since *theiotēs* emphasizes not reasoned speculation but observable actions (BDAG), as the context indicates, and 2 Pet. 1:4 refers to God's previously revealed character being formed in us.

51 See my earlier "Why the Narrative Shape of the Gospels Matter," *Crux* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 25–35.

52 Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 15.

53 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 184.

54 E. G. Weltin, *Athens and Jerusalem: An Interpretative Essay on Christianity and Classical Culture*, American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion 49 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 25.

55 See further, E. G. Weltin, "The Aristocratic," in *Athens and Jerusalem*, 151–82.

56 Granted that the difficulty of the text is universally acknowledged, Paul's characteristic use of "written" to refer to Scripture, backed by his own practice of arguing from and within it, suggests that Scripture is the safest option here.

57 See further Mark Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2000).

58 See the discussion in Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

59 For what follows, see, e.g., Vincent Carroll and David Shiflett, *Christianity on Trial: Arguments against Anti-Religious Bigotry* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001); E. A. Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008); Stark, *Rise of Christianity*.

60 See Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

61 Aristotle, quoted in Cartledge, *The Greeks*, 82.

62 As noted even by the Marxist philosopher Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

63 For much of the below including quotations, see Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2003), 295–99.

64 John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in epistulam ad Ephesios* 22.2; *Homiliae in epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses* 5.2; *Homiliae in epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses* 3.2.

65 Justinian, *Institutes* 1.7; *Code of Justinian* 7.3.1.

66 For the following, see Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 73–128; Carroll and Shiflett, *Christianity on Trial.*

67 For this and the following, including quotations, see Carroll and Shiflett, *Christianity on Trial*, 143–44.

68 Michael Riquet, *Christian Charity in Action* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961), 55.

69 Letter 84, to Arsacius the pagan high priest of Galatia; Bidez, *Epistulae*, 1.2: 144–47.

70 Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948), 602.

71 See further E. G. Weltin, "The Corporate and the 'Totalitarian,'" in *Athens and Jerusalem*, 21–49.

72 Weltin, "Corporate and the 'Totalitarian,'" 35.

73 Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections," University of Regensburg, Regensburg, Germany, September 12, 2006, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.

74 This is one of the main points of Elm, *Sons of Hellenism*.